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RUEHMD/AMEMBASSY MADRID 2139
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 0944
RUEHRL/AMEMBASSY BERLIN 0612
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RHMFIS/HQ USAFRICOM STUTTGART GE
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RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO 0614
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 NOUAKCHOTT 000278

SIPDIS

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TAGS: PGOV PREL KDEM KPAO MR

SUBJECT: MAURITANIA: POLITICAL ROUNDUP FOR THE WEEK OF
APRIL 12-16

REF: A. NOUAKCHOTT 203
1B. NOUAKCHOTT 271
1C. NOUAKCHOTT 268
1D. NOUAKCHOTT 240
1E. NOUAKCHOTT 276

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Dennis Hankins for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (SBU) Summary: For the week of April 12-16, the RFD party was on the verge of collapse, and Ahmed Ould Daddah had his strongest words yet for General Aziz. Ibrahima Sarr announced his candidacy for president, and renewed AU-Libyan and Senegalese mediation efforts failed to generate enthusiasm among the political class. A prominent Imam had harsh words for democracy, and several illegal immigrants were intercepted on their way to the Canary Islands. Aziz resigned on April 16, and Ba M'Bare assumed the presidency, becoming the first Afro-Mauritanian to do so. End summary.

12. (C) Teyib dispels rumors of APP schism: PolOff and PolAsst met APP Vice President Khalil Ould Teyib April 9. Teyib, leader of the Nasserist wing of APP (the party headed by FNDD leader and President of the National Assembly Messoud Ould Boulkheir), denied any schism within the party. (Rumors have been circulating that the Nasserists within APP had been bought out during Qadhafi's visit, and would support June 6 elections; Ref A, para 8). Teyib stated that he supported the position of APP President Messaoud Ould Boulkheir, and that Aziz's election plan was a "catastrophe." He added that Nasserism was a political movement bigger than any one country, and that Libya had "no effect at all" on the party.

13. (SBU) RFD implosion: RFD President Ahmed Ould Daddah rushed back to Nouakchott April 11 from a trip to France to hold a press conference. Daddah came out swinging, stating that General Aziz was "in the process of destroying the country." He further alleged that the junta was seeking to neutralize political parties, and stated that there was a "cell" within the RFD seeking to break the party apart. Daddah suspended RFD vice president Hamidou Baba Kane from the party, though Kane stated the next day he was staying in the party to lead a group in favor of June 6 elections. Numerous RFD members pledged their support to this pro-election faction.

14. (C) RFD implosion, continued: After Daddah's attack April

11, Aziz responded April 12, saying that Daddah had "encouraged" him to launch a coup against President Abdallahi, and that Daddah had been in favor of maintaining strong relations with Israel. The war of words continued April 13, with Daddah maintaining he was against coup d'etats, and had always disapproved of relations with Israel, who had "perpetrated savage aggression against our Palestinian brothers." Comment: Daddah is now paying the price for his shifting positions over the past eight months since the coup. Having tried and failed to make a deal with the devil, the devil has turned against him; RFD, the largest political party in Mauritania, is now effectively split into two, with Daddah leading one camp, and Kane leading the other. End comment.

¶ 15. (C) Ibrahima Sarr announces candidacy: Afro-Mauritanian and president of the AJD-MR party Ibrahima Sarr officially announced his candidacy April 11 (Ref B).

¶ 16. (SBU) Vall supposedly not running: Local press reports state that former President Ely Ould Mohamed Vall will not run in the June 6 elections. Reportedly there have been no efforts by his supporters to collect signatures to launch a candidacy. Additionally, Vall left Nouakchott this week on a trip around Africa that is supposed to last several weeks. Comment: Vall is also officially still in the military, despite repeated requests to be released. He would not be able to legally run as a presidential candidate unless he resigned his commission (and the military accepted his resignation, which it has so far refused to do). End comment.

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¶ 17. (SBU) Renewed AU-Libyan and Senegalese mediation efforts: The African Union and Libya started another mediation effort in an attempt to avoid sanctions on Mauritania, while the Senegalese also started another (apparently independent) mediation effort of their own (Ref C).

¶ 18. (C) Illegal immigrants arrested: Local media reported that authorities in Nouadhibou intercepted a group of 25 migrants (most of them Malian) attempting to reach the Canary Islands. Comment: As reported in Ref D, as long as the Mauritanian authorities continue to be effective in halting illegal immigration to the Canaries, the Spanish will be happy and continue to support the junta. End comment.

¶ 19. (SBU) Imam Tah speaks out: In an April 13 interview with the Al-Akhbar daily, prominent Imam Hamden Tah condemned opponents of the coup, stating that Islam "compels one to recognize reality." Tah went on to say "Personally, I detest democracy... I don't believe in it," and criticized the Western position on Mauritania. Comment: Tah has been supportive of every regime in Mauritania since independence, from Moktar Ould Daddah to General Aziz, with every regime in between. To some, this is pure opportunism; to others, this is strong adherence to Islamic Shari'a, which strives to avoid conflict by submitting to the person in power, no matter who it may be or how they gained it. Tah is seen as one of the leaders of moderate Islam and has been a key Mission partner in anti-extremism campaigns. FNDD members caused a sensation last year when they walked out of a Friday sermon given by a leading Imam (not Tah) who criticized the FNDD and called on people to support the military regime. End comment.

¶ 10. (SBU) Water shortages: The April 13 edition of "Nouakchott Info" reported water shortages in the suburbs of Nouakchott that are expected to worsen with the approach of the warm season. According to this source, water containers usually sold for 100 UM (approximately 38 cents) now sell for anything between 300 to 1000 UM (approximately \$1.14 to \$3.80). The April 13 edition of "L'Eveil Hebdo" reported water shortages in Aleg, where people must wait in line overnight to fill a container of water.

¶11. (C) Meeting with Alassane: PolAsst met April 14 with PLEJ president and FNDD activist Ba Mamadou Alassane. The PLEJ party is an Afro-Mauritanian party, and one of the "Big Five" of the FNDD (the other four being APP, Tawassoul, UFP, and PNDD-ADIL). Alassane reasserted the fundamental positions of the FNDD, such as the return of President Abdallahi, and so on. As for Aziz's resignation, Alassane was dismissive, saying "Aziz will leave without leaving," noting that he had already stacked the deck in his favor for upcoming elections by appointing his close associates in positions throughout the government. Moreover, Senate President Ba M'Bare would be a "hamstrung, symbolic president with no power." He said Ely Ould Mohamed Vall was "afraid" of Aziz, and would not run in elections. Asserting that the FNDD would do "everything" to stop the elections, including "taking to the streets," PolAsst sought clarification on their strategy. Alassane only said they were still in the process of discussing their options. He did note, however, that "now Ahmed Ould Daddah is with us."

¶12. (C) Meeting with Boulkheir: Charge met April 15 with National Assembly President Messaoud Ould Boulkheir (Ref E).

¶13. (C) Aziz resigns: Multiple press outlets and state-run media report that Aziz resigned, with little fanfare, around 10PM on April 15, and Senate President Ba M'Bare assumed the office of President of the Republic. Aziz also received the credentials of the Malian ambassador as his last act as President of the High State Council. According to various media outlets, Aziz spent the night at his private residence. There has been no official announcement or indication that Aziz has resigned his military commission yet although FNDD sources believe that has happened. RSO states that Aziz

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still enjoys the protection of a small personal protective detail composed of presidential security battalion (BASEP) guards, and in fact, still has direct control over BASEP as a whole. As for M'Bare, he is supposed to spend his first night in the Presidential Palace April 16.

¶14. (C) Aziz resigns, continued: Aziz recorded his resignation speech the evening of April 15 in the Presidential Palace, which was broadcast on TV Mauritanie at 1:30 in the morning. (TV Mauritanie also broadcast Aziz's "farewell" to the High State Council, the Constitutional Council's declaration of a vacancy in the office of the Presidency, and Ba M'Bare's accession to the presidency.) In his speech, Aziz extolled the accomplishments to date of his "August 6 movement," such as lowering prices for foodstuffs and reducing the government deficit. He railed against the corruption of previous regimes, and declared a "war without mercy" on mismanagement and corruption. He praised the "resolution" of the "passif humanitaire," and took a swipe at "the handful of citizens who call for sanctions only because they have lost the source of their personal interests." He claimed that freedom of expression had been strengthened under his reign, and that there were no "prisoners of opinion" in the country. Finally, he announced his resignation from the presidency of the High State Council and from his function as Head of State. He ended by saying that the purpose of his candidacy was to "build a new Mauritania marked by justice, liberty, and fairness, where all its citizens enjoy prosperity."

¶15. (SBU) Aziz in Dakar: Several news outlets reported on April 16 that Aziz left for Dakar in the morning via private jet. No explanation for the trip was given.

¶16. (C) Constitutional Council: Previous indications from the President of the Constitutional Council that, if given the chance, the Council would not rubber stamp the transition to an interim government seems to have come to naught. The Council reached a late night decision even before President Abdallahi and National Assembly President Ould Boulkheir had the opportunity to submit letters challenging the existence

of a "presidential vacancy."

¶17. (SBU) Government Resigns But Stays In Place: In compliance with the provisions of Article 40 of the constitution, the Laghdaf government appointed by General Aziz has resigned but will stay on in a caretaker mode until new presidential elections. Under the provisions of Article 40, the interim president is prohibited from removing any of the transition caretaker ministers.

HANKINS